

Issues and Considerations in Creating a Disaster Plan

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Synopsis

When creating and writing a disaster plan, the issues and considerations that arise are many and complex. Unforeseen obstacles will inevitably arise. Many institutions may fail to develop a disaster plan, simply because the process looks too difficult and daunting. Only when disaster strikes, does the necessity of the plan and procedures become immediately apparent. This paper discusses the issues that have arisen during the development of the QUT Library disaster plan, in a complex, changing environment. The issues include: gaining management support; gathering all appropriate data; considering minor and major disaster contingencies; financing the disaster plan; what to include in the plan; and how to maintain the plan. The paper attempts to provide a framework and impetus for the development of disaster plans for libraries and other institutions by demystifying the planning process.

Introduction

Why create a disaster plan?

Many books and articles have been written about this topic, and many more about the process. [1,2,3] Recent experiences at Deakin University Library and Katherine Library and Information Service serve to illustrate the need for a disaster plan which can be implemented with speed and efficiency.

The fire showed that disaster strikes without warning; highlighting that salvage procedures - including knowing which parts of the collections should be saved first - should be part of every library's planning process. [4]

...we did not have a disaster plan. We were intending to write one for a long time, but we had not done so. It is a necessity, especially for libraries in the tropics that have high temperature and humidity every day of the year. [5]

Have you ever considered what constitutes a disaster in your institution? Most of us are aware of the damage from fire and floods, although many may not consider all aspects of these disasters, such as smoke damage. However, have you considered the potential damage from:

- an earthquake?
- a window broken during a storm?
- an overflowing toilet?
- mould growing on otherwise undamaged books?
- chewing gum that was sitting on the shelf and transfers itself to the books?
- deliberate vandalism?

Having a disaster plan that covers **all contingencies**, including 'small scale' disasters and minor emergencies may avoid situations that we have encountered at QUT Library, such as people throwing wet and dry books together into a huge pile out of the way of the water or people wasting valuable time, running around trying to

locate the disaster kit.

The QUT Library experience has been that when a disaster occurs (and they do occur) the staff **must** have the name of the relevant person to contact. Even trained staff are unsure and insecure when faced reality of a disaster site. The first, and most important step is identifying key people who are responsible for directing disaster recovery. The second major step is having a plan of action which follows a logical sequence for the staff to follow. The overall disaster plan gives staff the confidence to proceed with disaster recovery, until the more experienced staff arrive.

A sad fact of life in all organisations is that staff change constantly. It is vital to have a **pool** of staff with current knowledge and training in counter disaster planning and disaster recovery. Having one or two staff with the necessary expertise will not help you if they have left the organisation, are on leave or simply unavailable. It is also critical that new staff are informed about the disaster plan as part of their orientation, and know how to proceed in the event of a disaster. Staff training has been recognised by many as possibly the most critical aspect of disaster preparedness as Carol Ruyle points out;

A major fire at Illinios State University's Milner Library showed that the written plan was helpful, but trained personnel would have made the recovery more efficient. [6]

The impetus for disaster planning

It is well recognised that libraries should have disaster plans, although surveys have shown that many still do not. The development of a disaster plan needs impetus. The impetus for creating a disaster plan may come from a previous disaster or 'near miss' or from specific people within the organisation, such as enthusiastic staff. The impetus may also come from management who may recognise the imperative need for a disaster plan and identify the necessary staff to drive it forward.

The Roles and Support of Management

In some, perhaps many organisations, the management may be supportive of the need for, and concept of counter disaster planning. In perhaps fewer organisations, management may be supportive of the time and costs needed to create disaster plans. If you are lucky enough to have completely supportive management, cherish them as we do at QUT Library! If you are not so lucky, the task must be to work on gaining management support. Matthew and Eden identified that management support is a

key and focal element of disaster management [7]

You may find that 'scare tactics' provide necessary impetus for management support. It may also strengthen your position to clarify management roles and responsibilities to demonstrate that disaster planning is both relevant and achievable.

Two vital ingredients for counter disaster planning are **time** and **money**. Researching background information, meeting to discuss issues, gathering data on your buildings, collections and staff skills, writing detailed procedures, meeting to discuss progress, collating information for contact lists, and meeting to evaluate information. All take significant time. It is critically important that management acknowledge the need for the finished product and allow time for the development. Our experience at QUT Library would indicate that it is not possible to write a plan for a large, multi-

collection, multi-branch institution quickly or easily. It is unlikely that a plan for a small, single-location institution could be written quickly or easily.

Formulation of a project budget is essential, even though a disaster plan is not an expensive item to create. Most of the expertise for the plan is likely to be contained within the organisation. Staff release time is needed to document the information and this is time not being spent on other tasks. Size and complexity of the institution will affect the costing. For example, printing the disaster plan in a small institution may constitute a couple of hundred pages, in a larger institution like QUT Library, with four branches, we printed eight copies at a significant cost.

As well as the vital role of support in preparation of a disaster plan, management has a critical role during disaster recovery. These roles include:

- financial support for hidden costs and direct costs
- negotiation with other sectors of an organisation to arrange for space, assistance, resources and restoration of utilities and for consultation on matters of health and safety or human resources
- consultation and advice in initial planning of recovery strategy and plan of action
- liaison with insurance assessor and agents
- information conduit to media and public relations with the home institution and the wider community
- information conduit to all staff in the institution who may not be directly involved in salvage, but who are critically affected by the interruption to library services and resources

Equally, it is important that management staff acknowledge the expertise of the trained disaster recovery staff and allow the “disaster controller” to direct the recovery staff, organise the extraction and treatment of material and advise on resources and timelines.

In general, the role of management in counter disaster planning and, especially, in disaster recovery is frequently overlooked. Management staff roles should be clearly defined in your disaster plan and the staff themselves should be made aware of their critical roles.

Knowing Where To Begin?

An organisation’s decision to develop a disaster plan can leave the staff charged with the task feeling somewhat daunted. The good news is that there are ways to make the task a little easier.

The Victorian organisation CAVAL (Cooperative Action in Victorian Academic Libraries) produces a range of counter disaster services and publications. CAVAL offers training in disaster recovery and planning. Another organisation, *Conservation Access* at the State Library of New South Wales also offers training in disaster recovery and planning. CAVAL also publishes two key items for Australian libraries; a “guidebook” to disaster planning [8] and a publication consisting of a computer disk with a model outline of a disaster plan which you may then modify and customise to suit your institution[9]. This is available in formats for Macintosh, MS Word and WordPerfect. Although this is an excellent ‘starting point’ for an institution, with all the key information identified and outlined, the QUT Library experience is that this

needs a great deal of modification and additions to suit your own situation. Both are available from CAVAL Limited 123 Dover St. Richmond VIC 3121 or by contacting CAVAL at <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~caval/>

A simple starting point for your plan is to 'plagiarise with style'. Many libraries are willing and happy to share their disaster plan with you, on request. From these you can obtain vital information about formatting, procedures and contacts in your area. At QUT, we 'borrowed' from the State Library of Queensland disaster manual. We have also shared our manual and procedures with two other libraries, on request. Some libraries are now making their manual available on the Web. QUT Library is in the process of putting its manual on the Web. Recently, Southern Cross University Library put their disaster plan on the Web.

[<http://wwwlib.scu.edu.au/library/policy/recovery.html>].

A related issue when facing this task, is that much of the publishing and discussion surrounding counter disaster planning for libraries only focuses on the **disaster plan** itself or the procedures for recovery of material. In our experience, the plan is merely the 'tip of the iceberg'. Ignoring the multitude of issues, costs and contexts, which are hidden deep below the articles about why to have a plan, what to include in your plan and how to format your plan could prove to be a Titanic experience! This article hopes to address and demystify the hidden considerations.

Emergency Response Plans

Many staff in an institution fail to distinguish the blurred line between emergency response plans, which address immediate action to protect life and property and disaster recovery plans, which involve the cleaning and salvage of damaged buildings and resources. This distinction must be made absolutely clear to staff, in order to avoid confusion and potential danger in an emergency situation. Staff should never begin disaster recovery, until the emergency situation has been resolved.

However, disaster plans should 'flow on' from emergency response plans and the emergency response plan should provide a context and 'starting point' for your disaster plan. A crucial example of this is the issue of 'clearance to re-enter' for your building. It should be clearly established in both the emergency response plans and the disaster plans who is responsible for allowing re-entry and ensuring those people are aware of the need to inform the disaster recovery team and library management in the first instance. A knowledge of the institution's emergency procedures would be extremely useful in mapping out the intersections.

Another emergency response situation which impinges strongly on your disaster plan is the issue of **not being allowed re-entry** to the building. It is a sad but true fact that many fires and other disasters are deliberately initiated. In this case it may be hours or days before you are allowed access to the disaster site. Your contingency plans must take this into account. You should also check your insurance, as some policies are very restrictive in cases of arson and vandalism.

A comprehensive emergency response plan can provide context and input to your disaster plan in that it may identify emergency situations which may then become disaster recovery situations. For example, the QUT Library emergency response

plans include procedures on situations such as:

- Building Evacuation
- Bomb/Extortion Threats
- Emergency Cleaning
- Fire
- Fumes/Gas Problems
- Lift Failures
- Storage of potentially hazardous materials
- Water Emergencies (Plumbing; Storms; Leaks)

How these situations, once resolved, intersect with your disaster plans is an important consideration. Many of the situations will require liaison with the sections in charge of facilities and buildings at your institution and, possibly, with external emergency services personnel. Establishing contact and building relations with these people can serve you well in disaster recovery.

Building The Plan - Laying The Foundation

The essence of any successful disaster plan must be that the plan is **appropriate to your institution**. The only way to ensure this is to lay the foundations of the plan with the right information. Knowledge of your collections, your buildings and your staff is essential.

Understanding Your Collections:

1. **Nature and value of collections:** Not all collections are aimed at research. Not all collections are valuable. Not all collections are even worth retaining. Understanding the components and nature of your various collections and establishing the quality of the collections (or various aspects of the collections) is very important.
2. **Replaceability:** If items are readily available at another branch of your institution, another local institution, or if items can be purchased quickly and easily as replacement, this is an important issue which affects disaster recovery decisions.
3. **Formats:** Various formats in your collections must be considered. Serial versus monographs holdings affects ease of replacement and also treatment of damaged items. Non-print formats have specific treatment and recovery issues for each format. How non-print formats are stored will also affect disaster recovery plans. Computer files or databases on central servers have very different recovery issues from standard print collections.
4. **Decisions:** It is important to identify the collection evaluation processes. It may seem obvious that a particular person is responsible for making decisions in your environment but, when it comes to the crunch, that person may not be available or may simply not feel capable of making these decisions without assistance. In QUT Library, coming to grips with this issue has led to the development of detailed guidelines for decision-making for the various formats and different quality items in the collections.
5. **Priority Lists:** Agreeing on priority lists may be difficult, and the issue has sparked enormous debate at QUT Library, with every sector and many individuals with strong opinions. After lengthy discussions in many arenas, priorities were established for the collections and staff documents, files, computer files and more.

Understanding Your Buildings:

1. **Physical Facilities:** Do you know where the electrical panel for your building is located? Do you know where the water main is located? How many stacks are located on each floor? A complete **building audit** is essential as a foundation for planning disaster recovery efforts. QUT Library is happy to provide you with a copy of the *Housing and Protection of Library Resources Questionnaire* that we used to analyse our collections. The purpose of this questionnaire is to familiarise library management with the resources of the library in the context of potential disaster areas. It is also intended to help focus attention on areas which might otherwise be overlooked in the event of such disasters. It is divided into five categories:
 - a) The Library Building
 - b) Internal Features
 - c) Library Operations
 - d) Physical Protective Measures
 - e) Financial Protective Measures
 - f) Preventive Measures
2. **Contents:** Have you considered the replacement of **furniture and equipment** following a disaster? When your insurance agent asks how many desks, chairs, computers, microform readers, whiteboards, cupboards, etc., were destroyed, can you tell them? At QUT Library, we are establishing a **video-audit** of the branches which can be stored off-site and easily viewed in the event of a disaster, to establish what was in the room.
3. **Occupants:** Your recovery plans will inevitably be affected by the presence of any other occupants in your building. You will certainly need to negotiate with the people, particularly if you share any working or storage space. You may provide them with the impetus to develop their own disaster plans to ensure coordinated action and independent responses, in the event of a disaster.

Understanding Your Staff:

Your staff will play a critical role in the planning process and in recovery. It is essential that you have a complete understanding of the skills, expertise and strengths of all of your staff.

- Who has the expertise in **disaster recovery**?
- Who has the expertise in **subject areas**?
- Who has the expertise in **repairing damaged items**?
- Who has the expertise in **non-print and computing** material?
- Who would be willing to **volunteer** to assist in disaster recovery at 3 am on a Sunday?
- Who in **other sections** of your institution or **externally** could provide assistance and advice in the event of a disaster?

Building The Plan - Gathering Data

Once you have established your framework for your plan, either by creating your own, borrowing from your colleagues or buying the CAVAL kit, the next important step in building your disaster plan is in gathering all the appropriate data. Some of the data you will need for an effective plan includes:

- **procedures** for disaster recovery - building in the valuable background

information on your collections, the formats, the quality and relative value of the collections

- **priority lists** for retrieval and recovery of material - considering both valuable material and material required urgently to re-establish service, either on or off-site
- **contact numbers** for disaster recovery staff and other staff in your organisation who will need to be involved or consulted
- **insurance details** for your buildings and collections. Your insurer should approve **immediate recovery efforts** before insurance inspection. Insurance inspections may take considerable time, which will severely hinder recovery efforts. Some insurers will **require** immediate action on damaged collections or they will not pay full replacement costs.
- **sources and suppliers of resources and services** for disaster recovery such as water removal, vacuum freeze drying, freezers, boxes and trucks in your own institution and in the region
- **make contact** with fire services and emergency services to ensure that responding teams understand your buildings and your collections and can minimise further damage

Building The Plan - Adjusting For Context

No matter what your situation, no standard or borrowed plan is going to suit you completely. It is always necessary to make changes to suit your particular context. Some of the contexts that arose for us at QUT Library necessitated major contextual adjustments.

Multi-Branch Libraries:

- At QUT Library, we constantly strive to maintain a **centralised focus** for our policies and procedures. This decreases confusion and difficulties for both staff and clients at our various branches. It was important for us to maintain this centralised focus in our counter disaster planning as well. Of course, adjustments were necessary because of various factors, but the overall directions were maintained.
- Because the various branches are at different locations and in **different buildings**, there were different issues that had to be identified and resolved for each branch. These necessitated a building audit for each branch with different outcomes and variations in procedures for evacuation and clearance. The different foci in the collections and varying formats and age of collections required branch-specific considerations.
- An advantage of a multi-branch situation lies in the ability to **maintain service** to the clients. Many resources and all services are duplicated at each branch. In the event of a major disaster, this would allow the institution to maintain services, at least at a basic level, by re-stocking the affected branch and relocating resources.

Within The University:

- Part-way through the development of our library disaster plan, we became aware of the development of a **QUT Disaster Plan**. We realised it would be important for us to maintain integrity between the plans and we sought a liaison between our Subcommittee and the University staff developing the overall QUT plan.
- Many of the other sections who share buildings with the Library branches belong

to the same **Division of Information and Academic Services**. We therefore sought to include these people in the Library disaster plan by calling for priority lists for their equipment and resources and by informing them about our disaster plan.

Building The Plan - Stumbling Blocks

While constructing any complex document, you are bound to encounter problems and issues that require difficult decisions. At QUT Library, we are no different and some of the stumbling blocks we encountered taught us a great deal.

Support:

- At QUT Library we have been very lucky, in that management is very supportive of the counter disaster planning process. We also have a direct reporting line to the Director, Library Services and the senior Library management group, which has allowed for speedy decisions and decisive action. However, like all libraries today, we have come under extreme pressure due to **lack of staff time** and **diminishing money** and staff resources. It has not always been possible for staff to find time to perform the necessary planning and training and middle management do not always recognise this as a priority and begrudge staff time away from regular duties.
- Many staff in technical and administrative positions have volunteered for training in disaster recovery at QUT Library. However, there has been a distinct **lack of subject specialist volunteers** who could make informed decisions during disaster recovery. This problem has necessitated the development of detailed guidelines to inform these decisions for the technical and administrative staff.

People:

- It is a fact of life that different people have **different perceptions**. When constructing priority lists, procedures and when evaluating items for recovery, individuals will disagree strongly on relative importance. Can you mediate between a “hoarder librarian” and a “chucker librarian”?
- A conflict arose for us while compiling our Disaster Recovery manual; that of **staff privacy versus staff accessibility**. Let’s face it, a disaster usually occurs at night or weekends. Being able to contact trained staff quickly is paramount, yet including the staff contact numbers in the manual was a contentious issue. Management must protect staff privacy but the cost may be considerable. The issue was resolved by having senior staff contacts included and contacts of volunteers who are willing to list their home numbers.
- The **transfer and departure of staff** has posed an ongoing problem for QUT Library. Maintaining a group of trained disaster controllers has been difficult, maintaining a pool of trained volunteers has been close to impossible! Staff in QUT Library are apt to moving from branch to branch (including the four ‘disaster controllers’). Unfortunately, they are also prone to leaving! This means a shifting pool of trained staff to assist in major and minor disaster recovery. A strategy used to combat this problem has been to utilise staff and experts from all branches and regardless of the location of the incident.

The Plan!

After long and challenging discussions, we finally agreed on a format for the QUT Library Disaster Recovery Manual. It went through several incarnations and bits were removed and added, but we are happy with the result. And also very proud. So what did we decide to include? The contents pages are included as Appendix A, the following are some of the most important features.

- We decided to build a framework, actually a flowchart, and we called it our **Disaster Response Flowchart** (included as Appendix B). This is a simple step-by-step process for disaster response which staff can read and understand (and follow the steps) at a glance.
- We felt it was necessary to include definitions of the **Roles and Responsibilities of Disaster Recovery Staff**. This includes the role of the Disaster Controller and the role of management staff during disaster recovery.
- The **Disaster Recovery Procedures** were built from the CAVAL framework, but were completely customised for our purpose. It is essential that procedures are *very simple, very clear and very explicit*. Much has been written that may assist you about procedures for the recovery of material from fire and water damage. [10] Once developed, procedures should be tested, both on inexperienced staff and on all types of material. You may discover, as we did, that the procedure you wrote for microfiche recovery does not work at all!
- **Appendices** contain all the miscellany, such as priority lists, sources of supplies and contacts, staff contacts
- We had to consider the issue of **making your plan accessible** to the staff from the perspective of tight budgetary constraints. It was impossible for us to make large numbers of copies of a such a large, complex document, yet we had to ensure all staff had ready access. Our solution was a judicious number of copies in central locations and to make the key components of the plan available via the Web. However, an issue to consider in making your plan available via the Web is that of **not** making confidential information about your staff or buildings available to the general public. If your plan is on the Web, it is able to be copied easily by others who may not acknowledge your work, regardless of copyright law.

Additional Resources

Another issue in creating your disaster plan, is that the plan itself is rarely the end. Many of the issues you consider as you are building and writing your plan will highlight the need for additional resources. Some of the resources we have developed are:

- **Disaster Kits** which contain the basic essentials for responding to a small-scale disaster. The contents of our disaster kits are included as an appendix. We also faced the necessity of maintaining disaster kits at each branch of our Library. This meant duplication of resources and provision of funding, but it was essential for speedy and appropriate action.
- **Cameras** are extremely useful in disaster recovery. Photographs (or videos) of the disaster site *before* any action is taken will be of value for insurance purposes. Maintaining a visual record of the recovery and treatment process helps to inform other staff, mark progress and conduct post-mortems of the successes and failures of your plan.
- Another important development has been a **staff training schedule**. Although

staff are not trained as consistently as we would like, we have developed training strategies and programs that include procedural training, hands-on training and hypothetical scenario response training. Many institutions have regular training schedules and training for library students is also becoming more prevalent. [11]

Maintaining Your Plan

No organisation and, therefore, no disaster plan is static. Changing staff, changing priorities, renovated buildings, weeding; all of these will affect the disaster plan and it must be review periodically and especially after any major change. Issues like movement of collections and movement of entire sections and their furniture and equipment will necessitate major changes. At QUT Library, we have implemented a new library system, which has the capacity for offline information storage, which will be extremely useful in recording decisions and information during disasters. All changes to buildings, policies, equipment and resources should be considered for their potential impact on your disaster plan.

Other issues, such as disastrous events or knowledge gained from seminars, conferences or articles may prompt major changes to your disaster plan. An idea may present a new direction or expose a major omission in your plan. It is important to keep current in both your ideas and skills. It is also important to test the plan out (hopefully hypothetically!) as nothing points out the gaps like hands-on application.

How To Update?

- A person or group of people must be given the responsibility for updating the plan periodically. An annual review is logical. It is also logical, where possible, to leave the review with the person or group responsible for creating the initial plan.
- Your plan or manual should be loose-leaf in a format which allows easy removal of old sections and replacement and addition of new sections. It is also important to consider how you number or label the sections for ease of updating.

Keeping Current:

- Professional reading from journals
- Attending conferences and seminars
- Web information - have a browse
- Email discussions
- Regular training for both the 'disaster controllers' and the volunteer staff

Conclusion

Creating a disaster plan is not a simple or straightforward task. Many issues impact on the development, implementation and maintenance of a disaster plan. We have tried to highlight some of the important considerations and we trust that these assist other institutions with the development and implementation of their disaster plans.

In summary, the following are key considerations:

- Make sure that your management are supportive of your disaster planning efforts and provide the appropriate time, money and staff for effective planning
- You don't have to start from scratch; ask a colleague, browse the Web, someone will be willing to share

- Make sure that the staff at all levels are aware of your plans and have a simple process to follow when responding to disaster situations
- Make sure you plan for all contingencies; the leaking roof can be as damaging as the rising flood and much more likely to occur
- Make sure you have all the appropriate information to feed into your plan, understand your collections, your buildings, your staff and your context
- Gather all the appropriate data; again someone will probably share information about resources and suppliers in your district
- Consider each stumbling block a challenge, because you are certain to encounter some along the way
- Remember, the first time you write, format and print your plan will look *nothing like* your final version!
- Implementing a disaster plan takes additional resources; treatment materials, trained staff
- The plan is dynamic and must change as your institution changes, so keep it flexible and review it regularly

And you will always know that you can face any disaster, minor or catastrophic.

Notes

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Appendix A.

QUT LIBRARY DISASTER RECOVERY MANUAL CONTENTS

Section A: Disaster Recovery Plan (Overview)

1. Introduction to the Disaster Recovery Manual
2. Disaster Response Flowchart
3. Role of Disaster Recovery Staff and Responsibilities During Disaster Recovery

Section B: Disaster Recovery Procedures

1. Initial Assessment and Planning
2. Recovery of material
3. Rehabilitation of damaged area
4. Post Disaster Recovery

Section C: Appendices

Appendix 1	Items for priority action
Appendix 2	Key personnel
Appendix 3	Complete Staff Lists
Appendix 4	Sources of supplies
Appendix 5	Record sheets and Other Forms
Appendix 6	Campus Maps
Appendix 7	Operational kits
Appendix 8	Disaster Kits: contents and location on campus
Appendix 9	Housing and Protections of Library Resources
Appendix 10	Relevant Readings & Internet Sites Evaluations

Author Autobiographies

Robyn Tweedale has nine years experience in QUT Library. Robyn has worked in interlibrary loans, reference, library systems, as a Lending Manager, and currently works as a Reference Services Manager. Robyn became involved in counter-disaster planning early in her library career, her interest was sparked by attending a CAVAl workshop on disaster recovery. Robyn has contributed significantly to the QUT Library Disaster Plan and has helped to drive forward a strong culture of disaster awareness.

Gillian Harrison has worked in academic libraries for approximately 19 years, at the University of South Australia and QUT. Gillian has a background in reference services, and more recently, as a Lending Services Manager. Gillian has always had a strong interest in preservation and counter-disaster planning. Gillian participated with enthusiasm in developing the QUT Library Disaster Plan and could see the practical application of disaster recovery to lending, in dealing with minor disasters and deliberate damage. Gillian's current role as building warden lends a convenient continuity between emergency response plans and disaster recovery plans.

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